

X - 78 - 85. Newsweek, November 13, 1944, "One Man's Fight Against
Corruption: Story Behind The Stillwell Incident"

One Man's Fight Against Corruption: Story Behind the Stilwell Incident

The complicated story behind the recall of Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell from the China-Burma-India theater was brought into the open last week in dispatches from correspondents in New York, Washington, London, and New Delhi. But the full details, available only in Chungking, still could not be cabled from there. American censors were willing to pass the dispatches but Chinese censors cut them to ribbons.

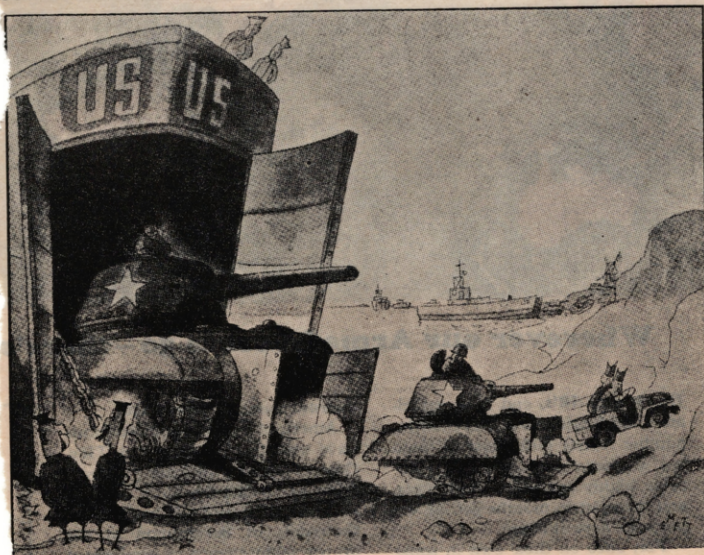
That was what happened to the following dispatch from Harold Isaacs, NEWSWEEK correspondent in China. The United States censors passed it completely but the Chinese slashed it. However, Isaacs succeeded in transmitting the story to New York by other channels. It provides the first complete account of the dispute between Stilwell and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and the part played by the missions headed by Vice President Henry A. Wallace and Maj. Gen. Patrick J. Hurley, sent from Washington to Chungking some months ago.

The recall of General Stilwell, at the specific demand and insistence of Chiang Kai-shek, meant the collapse for all immediate, practical purposes of the lengthy negotiations designed to rationalize and improve Chungking's part in the war against Japan. It represented a total success for Chungking's delaying tactics. If there was ever any doubt about it before, there can be none now; China has been written out of the plans for defeating Japan.

Any interpretation of the recall which lays the blame exclusively on Stilwell fails to take into account the essential dynamics of the situation. Stilwell fought a losing battle against inertia, corruption, inefficiency, and questionable mo-

tives. Washington came strongly to his support in an effort to improve matters, but when Chiang—with his back to the wall—countered with a demand for Stilwell's recall, Washington pulled the props out from under the general and let Chiang have his way.

Chiang Agrees: Six months ago the Americans began putting pressure on Chungking for radical changes in the highly unsatisfactory Sino-American military setup. Originally it had been hoped the Chinese might be able to push to the coast to link up with eventual American landings, at least to the extent of ensuring the safety of forward American air bases. These hopes were finally ended



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by the success of the current Jap drive in Central China. It was evident early in the summer that the most that could be expected of the Chinese would be to keep Japan's 24 divisions in China sufficiently engaged to prevent any serious withdrawal for reinforcing points outside China which might come under American attack.

To accomplish this minimum end the Americans proposed they be given full command of the Chinese field armies with power to weed out incompetents, consolidate forces, determine the movement and disposition of selected armies, and exercise control over supply, transport, and training. They also demanded a relaxation of the blockade of Communist areas to permit Communist forces to receive American arms and thereby to take a more effective part in operations against the Japanese. It was in this connection that Vice President Wallace urged a Kuomintang-Communist settlement and emphasized to Chiang that there was no reason to count on any basic anti-Russian orientation in United States policy.

During the negotiations Chungking showed an unyielding attitude, especially on the Communist question. The American tone also gradually stiffened, culminating in the threat to pull out of China entirely unless some reasonably acceptable adjustments were made. Chiang was finally put in a position where apparently he had to bend or break. Naturally, he decided to bend.

About one week after the arrival of General Hurley he formally agreed to give the full field command to Stilwell, in whom he expressed his "full confidence."

Chiang Disagrees: The Americans promptly pressed for immediate implementation with a full settlement of all details of the new command setup. Chiang did not share their interest in speed.

Thus matters stood when the evacuation of the Kweilin air base suddenly spotlighted the full extent of the Central China debacle. Chiang thereupon interjected a new complication with the announcement that in view of the Central China reverses he would have to pull out forces just sent to reinforce the Salween front.

The strongest objections to this came at once from Washington. Opening of the Burma Road was the core of the plan to help China. Washington said the project could not be abandoned now for an inevitably futile effort to retrieve the irretrievable in Central China. Chiang's reply—abrupt and unheralded—was the demand for the recall of Stilwell. In a series of exchanges Chiang finally said he would accept all the American demands, but Stilwell would have to go.

Chiang gambled on his firm conviction that the White House would not abandon him and he won. Washington finally

said it could not accept reflections on Stilwell, but if Chiang insisted he would be withdrawn. Chiang insisted. Stilwell went.

Promises, Promises, Promises: With this turn of affairs, the Americans abruptly reversed themselves on the subject of command, apparently deciding they did not want it after all. Presumably it was realized that considering



U. S. Signal Corps photo from Acme

Foxhole to Featherbed: Shaved, bathed, and happy after weeks at the front, Pfc. G. T. Robert of Springfield, Mass., incredulously pats a real bed at a rest camp in Europe.

Chungking's attitude no effective command would ever be achieved, that Americans would acquire responsibility without real power and the result would be a preposterous flop.

Chinese "acceptance" of the other American demands remains purely academic until implemented. With Stilwell's departure and the inevitable need for acclimatizing a new man, this process is certain not to be swift. The question of arming the Communists is still tied up in negotiations in which General Hurley, seemingly alone of all informed people, believes progress is being made. Promises made in this deal can be taken as real only if and when they are actually carried out and that won't happen in a hurry.

The Aftermath

In the wake of the recall of Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell from China came a whole series of explanations, accusations, counteraccusations, and rosy plans for bettering Chinese-American relations:

☐ President Roosevelt confirmed the report that Clarence E. Gauss, American Ambassador to China, was resigning; but that, said the President, had nothing to do with Stilwell (see Periscope).

☐ Rep. Walter H. Judd, Minnesota Re-

publican, who was in Chungking recently, called Stilwell "the goat of personal government in Washington." Another Republican, Rep. Francis Case of South Dakota, blamed the return of Stilwell and Gaus on Harry Hopkins. He said Hopkins told Chinese Finance Minister H. H. Kung that Chiang "could get everything he wanted" by holding out in his negotiations with Donald M. Nelson and Maj. Gen. Patrick J. Hurley.

¶ In Chungking T. V. Soong, Chinese Foreign Minister, said Stilwell's recall was military, not political, and that Communist-Kuomintang relations had nothing to do with the break.

¶ General Stilwell, his four stars shining, arrived in Washington and announced through the War Department that he had nothing to say.

¶ President Roosevelt disclosed that Donald M. Nelson will return to China and set up a WPB there. Nelson will not stay long but he plans to take with him a deputy, an alcohol expert, and five steel men. They will remain to increase Chinese production of alcohol for use in trucks, thus saving gasoline flown over the Hump, and to improve steel output, now only 10 per cent of its current capacity.

War Without Logic

Of all the enemies the United States has ever met, the Japanese by long odds are the most devious. Last week on Leyte, as the first phase of the Philippines campaign drew to a close, the Japs surpassed their previous record with a series of shifty and often senseless maneuvers.

Surprise Withdrawal: First, a force of some 5,000 Japs made major efforts to hold the northern coast port of Carigara against the First Cavalry Division, coming from the east, and the 24th Infantry Division, moving up through the Leyte Valley. The Yank columns closed in on the port, the last strategic spot the enemy held in the Leyte Valley. The Japs had excellent defensive positions. Expecting a bloody fight to drive them out, the Americans laid down an eighteen-hour artillery barrage before assaulting the town. Japanese soldiers many times had withstood heavier barrages without budging. But they evacuated Carigara.

Out and In: Knowing beyond doubt that the island was lost, the Japanese then apparently decided to make a Bataan-type defense in order to delay future American operations in the Philippines. Despite tolls taken by PT-boats and planes, they sent reinforcements in barges from Cebu Island at night. At the same time they tried a new trick.

One afternoon American pilots saw boats loaded with Japs pull out to ships in Ormoc Harbor and return to shore empty. Naturally, they inferred the enemy was evacuating. However, on the



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night of Nov. 3, the Japs sneaked four big merchantmen and a destroyer escort into Ormoc. These debarked a strong force, perhaps as much as a division, together with tanks and trucks.

But instead of using the troops to develop a strong defense of the Ormoc area in preparation for the inevitable withdrawal, the Japanese commander boldly sent them in a 10-mile column northward along the main road to Pinamopoan, from which the highway swings east to Carigara. Low-flying planes dispersed the Japs repeatedly while American artillerymen emplaced 8-inch and 155-millimeter guns in position to smash the column miles before it neared its objective.

Heavy Going

Japs Fight Hard in Leyte Caves but Defense Lacks Organization

From Leyte Robert Shaplen, NEWSWEEK war correspondent, sends this close-up of warfare in the Philippine forests:

The first phase of Jap resistance on Leyte was stiff but isolated and disorganized. The pattern was much the same on all four fronts, but perhaps the outstanding fight was the battle of Catmon Ridge. It was also typical in the method of Jap resistance, in the variety of prepared defenses and in the weapons used. The victor was the junior division of the invasion, the 96th, fresh from the States.

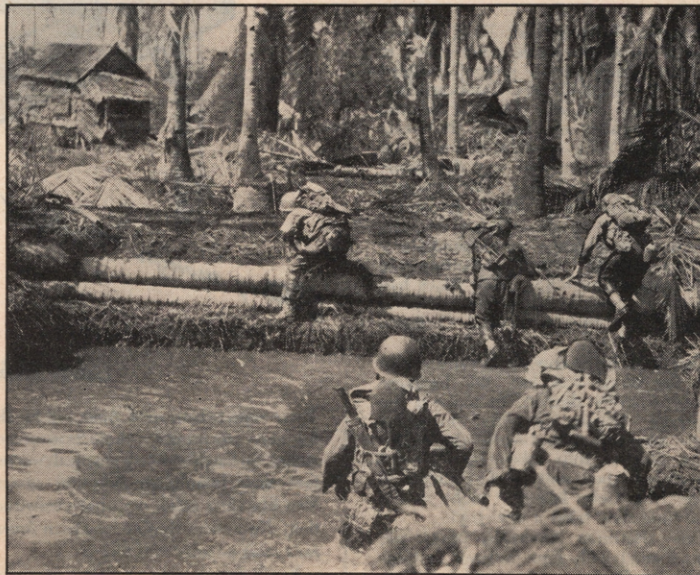
Catmon Ridge lies roughly in the center of the Eastern Leyte shoreline. About

3 miles long and 1,400 feet high, it is a heavily wooded, narrow hill interlaced with caves. There the Japs dug deep, intertwining foxholes; they built pillboxes out of concrete and coconut logs and filled them with machine guns that were impossible to see. Their tank forces brought 75-millimeter guns up the hill along a secret trail. Their horses even carried such luxuries of war as plumbing equipment, which the Jap officers installed in the caves and connected to mountain springs.

The enemy caves were not always connected, but were arranged checkerboard fashion close to each other, one cave in front with two caves right behind it on each side. In most of them the Japs had machine guns, with some additional light artillery. Beyond the caves were the pillboxes with the 75s, some of which, along with boxes of ammunition, had not yet been uncrated. The pack horses lay dead in the neighboring gullies, and there were indications that the Japs had eaten them once they had done their job.

There were probably 2,000 Jap troops in the Catmon hills when our warships let loose. Well dug in, the Japs withstood the bombardment.

Assaulting the Ridge: On the first day of the invasion, the 383rd Regiment of the division, under Col. Edwin May of Springfield, Mass., landed near the Laberanan head of the ridge, the southernmost point which extends in a curve to the sea. One battalion remained there to block the escape route; the rest of the regiment cut inland over a swamp and then swung along the western foothills



U. S. Signal Corps photo from International

It takes more than water-filled tank traps to stop the GIs on Leyte